

Out Of The Past

By Gershom Bradford

(Gershom Bradford, a distinguished naval historian, is the son of the late Laurence Bradford, who wrote a HISTORY OF DUXBURY.)

The old long bridge is falling a victim to the process of time. We all lament the fact. Way back on Oct. 12, 1892, near its completion, we celebrated with a field day of sports. It was a joint celebration for on that day, 400 years before, Rodrigo de Triana in the bow of the "Pinta," saw a dark line in the moonlight and cried, "Tierra, tierra!" One was a great day for the world, the other for Duxbury.

We gathered at the Point end of the bridge, under the direction of Thomas Knight, he of pleasant memory. He was the principal of Partridge Academy. There were bag, three-legged and potato races. Then there was a "greased pole," a quaint device consisting of a round spar horizontally extending over the water; it was well covered with fat. The winner was expected to reach the end, seize the little flag stuck in the end. Boy after boy tried to preserve balance, but failed and fell. At last a smart lad tried a new trick: he RAN out, grabbed the flag, and won amid cheers.

The big event was the bicycle race. Can you imagine high excitement over a bicycle race? How simple were our needs for fun! The era of the little wheel behind had passed. We had advanced to wheels of equal size. They were called "safeties," because there were no more "headers." In fact, we spoke of them as "wheels," rather than bicycles.

There were, perhaps, ten entries, nearly all the wheels in town. The course was to the beach end and back, on the sidewalk. There was an obstacle at the draw where the walk narrowed.

The width of the handle-bars forced the rider to jump off, run around the draw and on again.

Among the entries was Frank Needham with an innovation: a beautiful nickel-plated high wheel with the LITTLE wheel in FRONT. Frank's handle-bars were high; he zipped across the draw and won.

It is pleasant to remember that over those sturdy planks, for all these 80 years, have rolled or walked, more health and joy than we can ever guess. Over on the sands, romances have bloomed, rest has been found, and now and then a grief assuaged there by the sea. The mode of travel over the bridge has progressed from feet to horse, wheel and on to the faster push of noisome combustion. The styles have changed, the beach grass still fights for its dunes, but the sand shifts, the beach erodes, the bridge decays, only the ocean endures.

Byron knew all this and wrote:

"Time writes no wrinkles on thine azure brow,
Such as Creation's dawn beheld, thou rollest now."